‘Real’ Mind Style and Authenticity Effects in Fiction:

Represented Experiences of War in *Atonement*

ABSTRACT: Fictional representations of the “mind styles” of characters are often valued for their realism and their ability to invite understanding and sympathy. However, the power of fictional narratives to influence perceptions of real-world individuals with similar experiences raises questions of accuracy and ethics with regards to mind style. This article explores the linguistic means through which impressions of “realism” and “authenticity” are invited or denied as part of a fictional mind style: specifically, that of a Second World War soldier, Robbie Turner, in McEwan’s *Atonement* (2001). I outline literary critical concerns surrounding “legitimate” war literature, before introducing responses to *Atonement* which reveal the significance of what is “real” for readers of this novel. Adopting a cognitive stylistic approach to mind style using Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar, I argue that the language of this text contributes to conflicting impressions of realism and authenticity on first and second readings as part of the ethical question it poses for readers.

KEYWORDS: mind style, authenticity, realism, Cognitive Grammar, *Atonement*, war, trauma, ethics.

1. FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF (REAL) EXPERIENCE

Studies of “mind style”, or the linguistic representation of a distinctive worldview, have explored the myriad ways in which writers use language to create the impression of other minds. Since its introduction by Fowler in *Linguistics and the Novel*, the concept of mind style has largely been used to describe the idiosyncratic worldviews of fictional characters. A

significant trend within this research has seen it applied to characters or narrators with interpretable psychological conditions, such as schizophrenia (Bockting; Semino and Swindlehurst), autism (Semino, "Pragmatic Failure"), dementia (Lugea; Harrison, "Finding Elizabeth") and amnesia (Giovanelli, "Something Happened"), or to characters with sociopathic traits (Gregorio, "Behaving Badly"; Montoro; Semino, "Cognitive Stylistic Approach"). This work has tended to draw on research in psychology with regards to the symptoms and lived experiences of real people with such conditions, as part of a cognitive stylistic approach to mind style. While the individuals represented in these texts are for the most part imaginary, and their authors claim varying, often limited, knowledge of the real-world condition portrayed (see, for example, Semino, "Deixis and Fictional Minds" 429), fictional representations of such worldviews "tend to be valued, among other things, for their degree of realism" (Semino, "Pragmatic Failure" 143). Such realistic mind styles, Semino argues, have the potential to invite understanding and sympathy for characters and their alternative experiences of the world (155). Similarly, for Gregoriou ("Behaving Badly" 6), the invitation to share a new conceptual viewpoint through mind style, and its resulting de-mystification of behaviour, may invite sympathy for even criminal minds. While both Semino and Gregoriou describe mind style as contributing to "sympathy" for characters, others have argued that mind style is a powerful means of inviting "empathy" for other minds, by inviting readers to enact or embody a worldview during their processing of a text (Nuttall, *Mind Style* 30). Differentiated as the sensation of "feeling for" and "feeling with" a character respectively, with sympathy characterised by a greater degree of "distance" (Stockwell, *Texture* 56; see also Keen 206; Oatley 118; Sklar 56), sympathy and empathy can both be viewed as positive emotional effects of reading, to which a mind style may contribute. Indeed, the opportunity to share in others' conscious experiences, or the "qualia" of "what it is like" to be someone else,

is argued to be a defining feature of, and motivation for, reading fictional narratives more broadly (Herman, *Basic Elements* 225; also Fludernik; Margolin; Zunshine).

In addition, fictional representations of experience, it is argued, have potential implications for "folk" understandings and societal attitudes towards the *real* people affected by such conditions (Bates; Gregoriou *Language, Ideology and Identity*; Semino, "Pragmatic Failure" 155). While opportunities for sympathy or empathy and challenges to our understanding of what it means to be "normal" in terms of mind are positive outcomes, the power of such narratives to influence perceptions raises questions with regards to the accuracy of the representation, and the ethics of doing so from a third-person perspective (cf. Hatavara et al. 295-6; Schiff et al.). In their analysis of Henry and Patrick Cockburn's autobiographical novel *Henry's Voices*, Demjén and Semino argue for "the importance of first person, 'expert by experience' narratives" for understanding conditions like schizophrenia (62). As such work begins to consider the "real" mind styles evident in (auto)biographical narratives (also Demjén; Emmott and Alexander; Senkbeil and Hoppe), the accuracy, authenticity and ethics of the fictional mind styles we encounter alongside them become issues of increasing importance.

This article examines these issues with regards to a different kind of mind style: the traumatic experiences of a soldier in the Second World War. In the following section, I outline key critical concerns surrounding authentic representations of experience in war literature, before introducing a novel in which these concerns are explored thematically and structurally. Drawing on reader responses to this novel, I outline an approach to the concepts of realism and authenticity from a stylistic perspective.

2. WRITING ABOUT WAR: MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*

While the extremes of experience and trauma portrayed by war literature have been the subject of previous stylistic analysis (e.g. work on poetry of the First World War by Giovanelli "Conceptual Proximity"; Hamilton; Stockwell "Texture of Authorial Intention"), narratives of war, and specifically of combat, have yet to be analyzed in terms of the mind styles they portray. In his 2018 article "Why Write About War?", writer and ex-soldier in the British Army, Andy Owen, discusses the role of both fictional and (auto)biographical representations of war in creating empathy and understanding for those who were not there to experience it. Owen notes a paradox underpinning this writerly objective, stating that:

> Throughout war literature this is a common theme: trying to bridge a gap of understanding between those who fought and those who did not. War writers have long tried to explain to those back home, whilst often also claiming that no-one who was not there can really understand.

This attitude is paralleled, Owen argues, by a belief among readers that the authors of war narratives must have "legitimacy through experience", or have actually witnessed the events for themselves. This same ideology is identified in literary criticism by Campbell as "combat gnosticism": "the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience" (203). For Campbell, this mainstream ideology is one which limits the canon of texts seen as "legitimate" First World War literature to those written by combatants, at the expense of women and other civilian perspectives.

The themes of witnessing and legitimately representing experiences of war are at the heart of Ian McEwan's fictional novel *Atonement.* The novel is set in England and France before, during and after the Second World War, and presents the perspectives of multiple

characters, including sisters Briony and Cecilia Tallis, nurses working in London during the Blitz. Part One of the novel is set in 1935 and focalised through Briony, a thirteen-year-old girl and budding author. In the narrative that follows, Briony witnesses a number of events, including a sexual encounter between her sister and her lover, Robbie Turner, and, that same night, the rape of her cousin. Too young to fully comprehend what she saw, Briony believes the events connected and falsely identifies Robbie as the rapist. A convicted Robbie is sent as an infantry soldier to northern France and in Part Two of the novel, set in 1940 and now focalised through Robbie, we follow his experiences of the retreat to Dunkirk. Part Three of the novel depicts Briony's training as a nurse and her attempts to seek forgiveness from Robbie and Cecilia – now reunited – for her earlier false testimony. Following this apparent ending to the narrative is a final section, or post-script, entitled "London, 1999". Here, a now 77-year-old Briony reveals herself as the author, or homodiegetic narrator, of the foregoing narrative. The novel she has written, we learn, is her attempt to set the record straight as a final act of atonement.

This closing section provokes the reader to question and reinterpret events and perspectives presented up to this point. This post-script reveals a tension between author-Briony's claims to accuracy and objectivity, and the artistic license she admits to having taken in reconstructing and altering events as part of her story. She describes her efforts to obtain first-hand accounts of the events she did not witness herself, including letters from Robbie's fellow soldiers, and her "duty to disguise nothing – the names, the places, the exact circumstances – I put it all there as a matter of historical record" (McEwan 369) in reporting events surrounding the rape. However, two pages later, revealing the actual fates of Cecilia and Robbie to have been very different to those described, she says:

> How could that constitute an ending? What sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? […] No one will care what events and which individuals

were misrepresented to make a novel. I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what really happened? The answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. (371)

Reviews of *Atonement* on Goodreads.com reveal this question of "what really happened" to be prevalent in responses to the novel. Responses such as those below reflect readers' attempts to judge which of the experiences portrayed in the novel are "real", or the creation of the fictional-author (my emphasis added).

I am just struggling to now understand which events in *Atonement* were Briony's creation, and which events were **real**. Their letters would have allowed Briony to gain an insight into their relationship - would she have known about their cafe meeting, or did she invent it? - and [would] Nettle's letters have allowed her to accurately describe Robbie's war experiences, and understand what he went through. (R1, Goodreads)

I marveled [sic.] at how **real** parts 2 (Robbie at war) and 3 (Briony as a nurse--some of the hospital scenes are the I've ever read) seemed to be. Then the question became for me--if they seemed **real** because of the way the scenes were written (the gore again in the hospital), but could not have been **real** because the characters and overall plot of the Tallis family are so fake, isn't that cheating? (R2, Goodreads)

I found the jumps in time and perspective jarring and the (otherwise fascinating) chapter about Robbie's adventures in France somewhat **unreal**. Of course, there are good reasons for the slightly **unreal** quality of the Dunkirk chapter. (R3, Goodreads)

Notable in these reviews, and others on the site, is the varied impressions readers form of Robbie's wartime experiences with regards to realism. R2 notes the "real" quality of Part Two of the novel, before going on to raise an ethical issue with this apparent realism on the part of the author. Contrastingly, R3 finds Robbie's narrative to be qualitatively "unreal", before hinting that there are "good reasons" for this reading experience revealed by the novel; the fact that his narrative is a fictionalised, partial reconstruction by Briony.

The practical and ethical questions raised by this text with regards to rendering real experiences through fiction are also ones that implicate its real author. In an acknowledgements section immediately following Briony's post-script, McEwan cites several sources including autobiographical narratives and unpublished "letters, journals and reminiscences of soldiers and nurses" from the Imperial War Museum. For critics such as Head, McEwan's own act of fictional retelling raises similar ethical issues and an invited parallel with the themes of witnessing and false testimony explored in the story itself:

> When one delves into some of McEwan's sources, then, it is clear that he has relied on acute personal experiences, ranging from feelings of embarrassment or inadequacy at one end of the spectrum, to death at the other. Evidently, there are ethical problems that must arise in the use of such material. Most problematic is the fictionalizing of an actual death caused by severe head injuries. It is clear that the novel's debate about the propriety of the author's role, recasting first-hand testimony into fiction, has a direct bearing on the composition of the novel. (168)

This novel can therefore be seen to actively invite judgements of its homodiegetic narrator and real-world author in terms of realism, authenticity and legitimacy. While the last of these, legitimacy, is an ethical judgement concerning the "propriety" of an author, or their right to tell

a story, as discussed by Head, the former two can be seen as evaluative, aesthetic judgements of the text itself. Both realism and authenticity each have a possible objective measure in terms of accuracy of detail and verification of authorship respectively, however, they have come to be associated in stylistics with a range of other, more subjective, textual attributes such as the immediacy of narrative events, and the credibility and sincerity of the writer or narrator (Leech and Short 125-6; Jones 532-3). Supported by uses of terms such as "real" and "authentic" by readers such as those seen earlier in this section (see also Warner 9), an approach to these concepts as perceived qualities or readerly impressions of texts seems most appropriate. For stylistics, the question is how such impressions are influenced or driven by specific features of the text. As argued by Warner in her study of "authenticity effects" in feminist confession, this question is important, since such impressions contribute to the persuasive and emotional power of narratives for readers.

Building on existing stylistic research into "authenticity effects" in other non-fiction text-types such as autobiography (Warner) and advertising discourse (Jones), this article investigates how perceived qualities of realism and authenticity in represented experience can be achieved in fiction through mind style. I analyse the ways in which these impressions are invited, or inhibited, by the language used to present Robbie Turner's focalised experiences in *Atonement*. Focusing here on Part Two of the novel, and one extract in particular, I argue that linguistic choices contributing to a mind style for this character promote conflicting impressions of realism and authenticity during first and second readings.

3. MIND STYLE AND COGNITIVE GRAMMAR

For its analysis of mind style, this article adopts a cognitive stylistic approach drawing on Langacker's *Cognitive Grammar* (CG) (Harrison, "Finding Elizabeth"; Giovanelli,

"Something happened"; Nuttall, "Attributing minds", *Mind Style*). This framework offers a means of analyzing the linguistic patterns, or "cumulatively, consistent structural options" (Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* 76), said to be responsible for this textual effect. Viewed in CG terms, a mind style can be understood as a distinctive "construal" of a fictional world, or a writerly manipulation of our wider "ability to conceive and portray the same in situation in alternate ways" in thought and language (Langacker 43). Like other cognitive linguistic frameworks, CG outlines several dimensions of construal along which representations of experience may differ (see Verhagen). For the purpose of this analysis, I shall focus on two of these dimensions: "focusing" and "prominence", both of which concern the directing of attention during conceptualization, or our mental representation of the world in terms of foreground and background (Langacker 57-73). By describing the cognitive effects of specific linguistic choices in these terms, CG's model of construal offers a systematic basis for explaining the impression of a mind at work that arises during reading.

In addition, CG's account of construal supports discussion of this effect in experiential (aesthetic, emotional and ethical) terms. Applications of this model to discourse have argued that construal applies at both ends of a communicative event: to the conceptualization encoded by the producer of a text, and to the conceptualization reached in the mind of a recipient (Hart; Harrison, *Cognitive Grammar in Contemporary Fiction*). While offering us the tools with which to recognize and analyze these construals as experientially distinct (Harrison, for example, distinguishes between "writer" and "reader" construals), this theoretical framework also recognizes the invited re-enactment of a writer or narrator's conceptualization processes that reading represents. As Herman explains, "story recipients, whether readers, viewers or listeners, work to interpret narratives by reconstructing the mental representations that have in turn guided their production" (*Story Logic* 1). Analyzed from this cognitive perspective, the "impression" (cf. Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* 76) of a mind style for an author, narrator

or character might be understood in clearer terms, as a re-enactment of that language user's cognitive habits as part of the reader's construal of the fictional world.

This enacted experience can be linked to mind style's ability to create understanding, sympathy and empathy towards other minds, identified in previous work on this textual effect (section 1; also Nuttall, *Mind Style*). Further, as I shall argue in the following section, the enactment of cognitive habits different to our own during reading can create impressions of realism and authenticity for the experiences represented.

4. A SOLDIER'S MIND STYLE

The extract chosen as the basis of this analysis describes Robbie Turner's journey as part of the mass retreat of allied forces towards the evacuation point at Dunkirk. The rationale for this choice of extract is: a) the intense action sequence it depicts; and b) the patterns of construal it contains, reflective of wider patterns within Robbie's narrative in Part Two of the novel. Readers have previously learned that Robbie is exhausted, wounded and potentially feverish; a piece of shrapnel is embedded in his side. In this scene, Robbie is in mid-conversation with a sergeant major when he sees an enemy fighter plane about to attack the "column" of retreating soldiers and civilians:

> He went on to say a good deal more, but it seemed to Turner that a muffling silence had descended on the bright late-morning scene. This time he wasn't asleep. He was looking past the major's shoulder towards the head of the column. Hanging there, a long way off, about thirty feet above the road, warped by the rising heat, was what looked like a plank of wood, suspended horizontally, with a bulge in its centre. The major's words were not reaching him, and nor were his own clear thoughts. The horizontal apparition

hovered in the sky without growing larger, and though he was beginning to understand its meaning, it was, as in a dream, impossible to begin to respond or move his limbs. His only action had been to open his mouth, but he could make no sound, and would not have known what to say, even if he could.

Then, precisely at the moment when sound flooded back in, he was able to shout, 'Go!' He began to run directly towards the nearest cover. It was the vaguest, least soldierly form of advice, but he sensed the corporals not far behind. Dreamlike too was the way he could not move his legs fast enough. It was not pain he felt below his ribs, but something scraping against the bone. He let his greatcoat fall. Fifty yards ahead was a three-ton lorry on its side. That black greasy chassis, that bulbous differential was his only home. He didn't have long to get there. A fighter was strafing the length of the column. The broad spray of fire was advancing up the road at two hundred miles an hour, a rattling hail-storm din of cannon rounds hitting metal and glass. No one inside the near-stationary vehicles had started to react. Drivers were only just registering the spectacle through their windscreens. They were where he had been seconds before. Men in the backs of lorries knew nothing. A sergeant stood in the centre of the road and raised his rifle. A woman screamed, and then fire was upon them just as Turner threw himself into the shadow of the upended lorry.

(McEwan 221-2)

4.1. IMMEDIACY

In terms of construal, one pattern observable in this extract relates to the way in which events and participants are "focused" in attention as part of the presentation of this scene. In CG, linguistic expressions are said to provide access to portions of knowledge as the basis of their meaning, referred to as their "immediate scope" (Langacker 63). The immediate scope of verbs

such as “run” and “advance”, for example, is a conceptualization of these bounded events in time. Noticeable in this extract is a tendency to restrict this attentional focus through the specific forms through which such processes are described. Verb combinations such as “able to shout”, “beginning to understand”, “begin to respond”, “began to run” and “started to react” restrict the immediate scope to an initial portion of the wider event described by the infinitive. In addition, use of the progressive and perfect verb forms seen across this extract impose a similar effect. In Langacker’s account (120-1), the conceptual import of the progressive (e.g. “were not reaching”, “scraping”, “was strafing”, “was advancing”, “rattling”, “hitting”, “were only just registering”) is to restrict focus to a central portion of the process through time, which excludes its start and end points (see Figure 1a). Comparably, use of the perfect (as in “had descended”, “had started”, “had been”) is said to restrict this immediate scope to the end of the verbal process, focusing on its final state (see Figure 1b). Building cumulatively across the extract, this restricted focusing deviates from the unrestricted conceptualization of action which would be invited by the simple past (or present) verb forms, instead imposing a particular perspective on events.

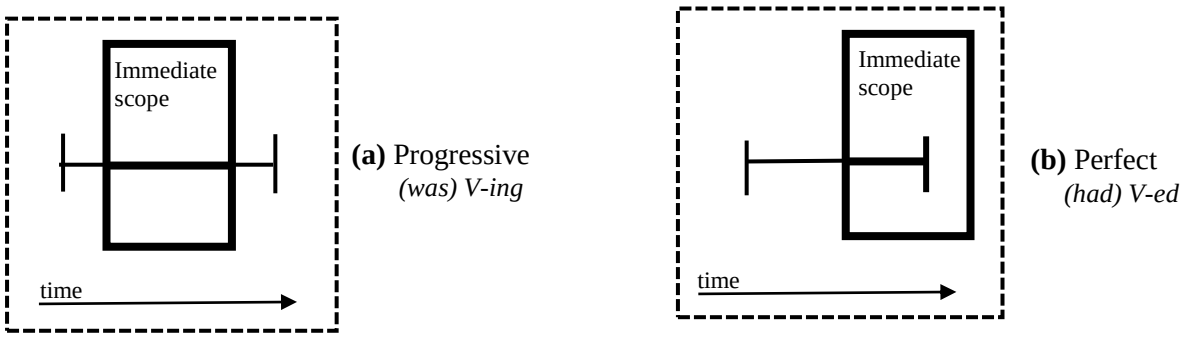

Figure 1: Restricted focusing imposed by progressive and perfect verb forms (based on Langacker 121)

Combined with reference to specific portions of time ("This time", "precisely at the moment", "seconds before") these linguistic patterns contribute to a common construal: an invitation to focus attention narrowly on events through time. At points in the narrative such as "he was beginning to understand" and "had started to react", the combination of these linguistic choices invites readers to focus attention on the mid-point of the beginning of Robbie's understanding, and the end-point of the start of the drivers' reactions. Cumulatively, this experiential "zooming in" effect during conceptualization contributes to a sense of the speed and intensity with which successive impressions pass through Robbie's mind, as though we are experiencing them in real-time alongside him. What results is an impression of immediacy, or "a relationship of both physical and emotional closeness" between the reader and the character's experiences (Warner 11).

4.2. DETACHMENT

Alongside the immediacy created through focusing, other aspects of this text's construal contribute a distinctive dreamlike, or detached, quality to the narrative. A closely related aspect of construal in CG, "prominence", concerns the directing of attention to particular entities or participants in a scene. Whenever a process or relationship is construed, one entity is singled out as the most prominent participant (or "trajector"), by virtue of being "located, evaluated or described" relative to an optional secondary participant (the "landmark") (Langacker 70). At the clause level, this prominent trajector participant is typically that found in grammatical subject position, and the landmark in object position. Cognitive Grammar describes the choice of trajector in a linguistic construal as motivated by a range of factors, including the "intrinsic salience" (66, 366) of certain types of entities in our embodied experiences of the world. These prominent entities include: agents (as opposed to patients, or passive recipients of action);

human or human-like entities (as opposed to objects or abstractions); definite, well-delineated entities (as opposed to indefinite ones); along with other features of perceptual "figures" as described in psychology (see also Stockwell, *Texture* 23-5).

The allocation of prominence in this extract is often unprototypical with respect to these factors. The first complex sentence presents successive trajectors, the last of which – "a muffling silence" – is indefinite, abstract and only minimally (metaphorically) agentive. Relative to the landmark of this clause: "the bright late morning scene", it is a less prototypical figure or "attractor" of attention (Stockwell, *Texture* 25) than this secondary participant, which is definite, concrete and easier to conceptualize. By inviting readers to pay most attention to "a muffling silence" here, this description might be said to disrupt a normal distinction between foreground and background as part of its mental representation, resulting in a sense of "defamiliarization" (Shklovsky). The competing prominence of these two entities and the resulting difficulty of conceptualization seems to reflect the synaesthesia and detachment from his immediate surroundings that Robbie experiences.

The prominent entities construed elsewhere in this extract share similar characteristics. Abstract agents such as "The major's words", "his own clear thoughts" and "the horizontal apparition" are profiled as trajectors in metaphorical, often negated, processes while concrete, human and bounded participants such as the major, Robbie and the fighter plane are backgrounded in attention. Also noticeable across this extract is the repeated use of a specific syntactic structure for the introduction of such prominent entities (see below, where trajectors have been highlighted in bold):

> Hanging there, a long way off, about thirty feet above the road, warped by the rising heat, was **what looked like a plank of wood**, suspended horizontally, with a bulge in its centre.

it was, as in a dream, **impossible to begin to respond or move his limbs**.

Dreamlike too was **the way he could not move his legs fast enough**.

It was **the vaguest, least soldierly form of advice**, but he sensed the corporals not far behind.

It was **not pain [that] he felt below his ribs**, but something scraping against the bone.

Fifty yards ahead was **a three-ton lorry on its side.**

This structure, referred to as a "setting-subject construction" (Langacker 451), includes use of fronted locative information and the dummy subject "it" to delay the introduction of new referents. By situating this new information in relation to given aspects of the situation, it creates an implicit expectation for their introduction. In the first instance here, this syntactic-expectation iconically reflects Robbie's own gradual recognition of "what looked like a plank of wood". Recurring in the sentences that follow, this syntactic structure helps to delay the reader's conceptualization of the scene, specifically the threat that Robbie is confronted with ("a fighter"), until *after* he has begun to flee. While previous mind style research has described the role of "under-lexicalization" in representing limited understanding as part of a mind style (e.g. Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism;* Leech and Short), here a "*delayed* lexicalization" in the construal of this enemy plane reflects Robbie's slow processing of what he sees, out of sync with his bodily reactions, which is characteristic of his mind style.

Further, the setting-subject construction is said to "abstract [] away from any particular experiencer, implying that anyone within the setting would see the events in question" (451). The use of the pronoun "it" for this purpose is described as "the extreme case of vagueness and nondelimitation" in this respect (452). Through its construal, then, this extract invites readers to attend to unprototypical (often abstract, indefinite or negated) trajectors as part of their conceptualization of this scene, and to do so relative to a very vague impression of the

conceptualizer, or vantage point, from which they are conceived. In terms of CG's discussion of perspective, this latter effect can be described as an "objective construal" (Langacker 77), or one which temporarily backgrounds the subject or self (Robbie Turner) to which these perceptions are attributed. The experiential effect of this construal, I suggest, is an impression of the "dreamlike" quality of Robbie's experiences and the detachment he feels from his own body.

In the final sentences of this extract, this sense of detachment becomes particularly striking. Having finally profiled the fighter and its advancing line of fire in attention, the description that follows invites us to attend to a series of prominent human subjects in sentence-initial position: "No one inside the near-stationary vehicles"; "Drivers"; "Men in the backs of lorries"; "A sergeant"; "A woman". While reflecting a range of different forms, these contribute to a shared effect for construal. Specifically, they each focus an indefinite number of individuals (directly or indirectly) within their immediate scope. Analyzed using CG, the indefinite pronoun "No one" invites a degree of awareness, as background, of the "everyone" it negates (see Langacker 59 on negation). For plural count nouns "Drivers" and "Men in the backs of lorries", what is profiled is an undefined group of homogenous individuals, which through their lack of explicit "nominal grounding" (e.g. an article, demonstrative, or quantifier; see Langacker 272) are ambiguously situated relative to the perceiver, Robbie. Finally, while "a sergeant" and "a woman" profile just one bounded individual, the indefinite article serves to indicate the existence of other sergeants and other women beyond those singled out for reference. While the ordering of these descriptions reflects an increasing "specificity" of reference (Langacker 55) suggestive of Robbie's own changing viewpoint as he runs, their focusing maintains a broader awareness of the military and civilian participants in this scene drawn from our knowledge of the Second World War, and a vague sense of the vantage point from which they are perceived. In other words, like the syntactic construction noted earlier,

they "abstract [] away from any particular experiencer", leaving us as readers to interpret how these generic impressions might relate to the specific spatio-temporal viewpoint of Robbie Turner. Contrasted with the narrow focusing of events and actions in time described earlier, this wider focusing of participants towards the end of the extract contributes to an expanded sense of scale and a movement away from Robbie's individual experiences in these climactic moments.

4.3. COMBAT AND TRAUMA

This extract reflects wider patterns of construal at work across this part of the novel and which we are invited to attribute to the distinctive mind style of this soldier-character. The very first sentence of Robbie's narrative in Part Two of the novel emphasises "the unexpected detail" of war "that threw him and afterwards would not let him go" (McEwan 191). Robbie's narrow focusing of detail and the unexpected, or unprototypical, entities he attends to are seen elsewhere in this part of the novel, most notably in the isolated human leg that he sees suspended in a tree: "It was a leg in a tree […] it was a perfect leg, pale, smooth, small enough to be a child's" (192). Interestingly, such narrow focusing of events and entities, and the invitation to view actions "up close" as part of a sense of immediacy or "conceptual proximity", is a feature noted by Giovanelli in his analysis of Siegfried Sassoon's trench poem "A Working Party", describing his experiences of the First World War ("Conceptual Proximity" 151). In *Atonement*, I would argue, a similar immediacy lends a sense of realism and authenticity to this fictional combatant's mind style.

As Robbie's fatigue, infection and fever worsens later in the narrative, we also see an increasingly apparent explanation for the detached, "dreamlike" construal we are invited to share:

> It was his mind. Periodically, something slipped. Some everyday principle of continuity, the humdrum element that held him where he was in his own story, faded from his view, abandoning him to a waking dream, in which there were thoughts, but no sense of who was having them. (McEwan 246)

Textual cues such as this invite readers to attribute the detached quality of the narrative to Robbie's physical deterioration, and perhaps as symptomatic of psychological trauma. Research into personal narrative accounts of trauma indicates that individuals who experience "horrific acts of violence, interpersonal abuse, deadly accidents, and large-scale atrocities and catastrophes" (Seeley 17) may "detach themselves from their surroundings as a coping mechanism for dealing with their experience" (Lambrou 45; see also Herman J.). Such detachment, it is suggested, may manifest linguistically in their use of third-person pronouns (Fergusson), along with other features associated with third-person witness reports such as generic reference (e.g. "people", "women" and "everyone") (Lambrou 45) and a sense of physical and emotional distance from "the site of the experience" (Warner 13). The objective construal seen in the extract here, or the vague, backgrounded impression of the physical vantage point from which Robbie experiences the scene, might then be interpreted as reflective of such trauma as part of a realistic mind style.

These patterns of construal, and the experience of a mind style they contribute to, are successful – for me and readers such as R2 (section 2) – in creating a powerful sense, or illusion, of real first-hand experiences of war. The two reviews of *Atonement* below further illustrate this positive reading experience:

> I loved the writing. I loved the characters. They were so well developed I could feel their emotions in myself as I read. (R4, Goodreads)

> I really felt like I was walking with Robbie, and Briony. I could imagine everything vividly. I almost cried a few times, because I could imagine the wounds, the bombs, and the tragedy of the war. I felt that I was in the pages grasping for that child, running from the air raids, cleaning, and bandaging the wounded. I was there in those pages walking with the annoying blisters, dry mouth, and exhausted limbs. (R5, Goodreads)

These responses to the characters seem to reflect a "feeling with", or embodied enactment of Robbie (and Briony's) emotions and experiences characteristic of literary definitions of empathy (see section 1). Further research could consider the extent to which such empathy in response to mind style might be distinguished from sympathy and its associated degree of "distance" and judgement in relation to characters (Sklar 56).

Notably, despite this emotional response, the two construal patterns I have identified in this text can be seen to work in opposition with regards to authenticity. Warner describes authenticity as arising when "the gap between the act of narrating and the embodied experience of that which is being narrated [is] eroded" (20) and emphases the importance of the reader's ability to "locate those experiences in the same 'body' that is telling the story" (13). While the immediacy or closeness to Robbie's bodily experiences described in section 4.1 can be seen as a cue for authenticity effects, the sense of detachment described in section 4.2 can be seen to oppose it, by creating a sense of "depersonalization" (Warner 13). These conflicting impressions, I would argue, foreshadow the powerful (but not entirely unexpected, and hence credible) revelation of the novel's concluding post-script. By inviting us to attribute the defamiliarizing, dreamlike qualities of this construal – including a backgrounded, vague sense

of self – to Robbie's fatigue, fever and trauma, even experiences of the narrative as "somewhat unreal" (R3) can be interpreted on first reading as part of an authentic enactment of this soldier's mind style.

5. AN AUTHOR'S MIND STYLE

The concluding post-script of this novel invites readers to reconstrue and reinterpret these same linguistic choices in light of new information (see also Harrison and Nuttall on "reconstrual"). New attention to Briony as homodiegetic narrator can be described as a shift in the perspective of the discourse, or an increasingly "subjective construal" (Langacker 77) in which attention – originally directed to the events and perceptions described – is now divided between these experiences and the narrator-self through whom they are represented. In Figure 2, this shift in attention to the various selves, or conceptualizers, at different levels of this narrative discourse is indicated by the strength of the lines. Taking this further, the acknowledgements section which follows the post-script can be seen to further subjectify the construal, or divide attention in this way, by inviting increased awareness of the mediating conceptualizer, McEwan, at an author level (see Figure 2).

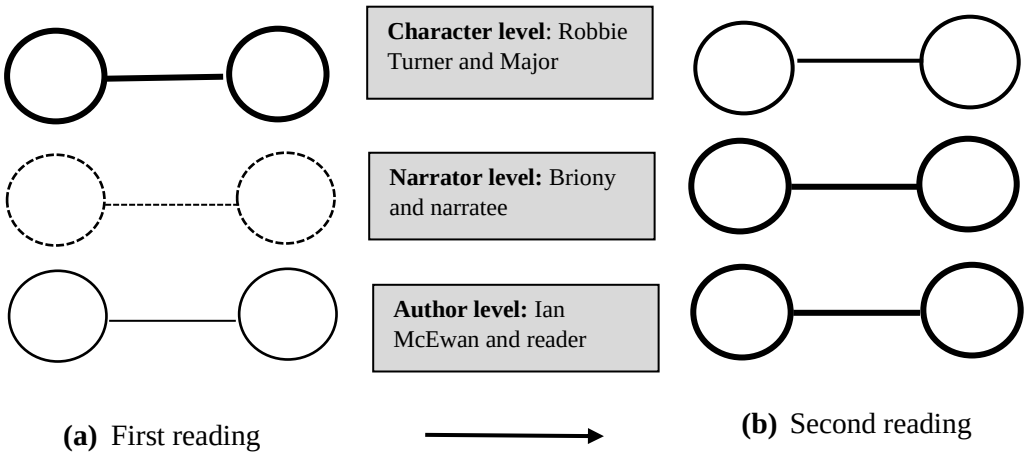

Figure 2: Distributed attention to multiple conceptualizers in narrative on first and second readings (adapted from Verhagen 60; also Nuttall, *Mind Style* 59)

As part of this reconstrual, the linguistic choices and cognitive effects identified in the previous section may now be attributed to these other minds. As a result of this new perspective, textual cues which were "buried" in Robbie's narrative during a first reading (Sanford and Emmott), such as those below, can be recognized as reflecting the thoughts of Briony, or even McEwan himself:

> Who could ever describe this confusion, and come up with the village names and the dates for the history books? And take the reasonable view and begin to assign the blame? No one would ever know what it was like to be here. Without the details there could be no larger picture. (McEwan 227)

> there weren't enough people, enough paper and pens, enough patience and peace, to take down the statements of all the witnesses and gather in the facts. (246)

During a second reading, such textual cues prompt us to interpret the defamiliarizing construal, its shifting focusing and abstracted sense of self as reflective less of the character's traumatic psychological experience of war, and more of the author's struggle with accuracy and her/his standpoint on the ethical issues it raises.

The possibility of attributing the same textual patterns to multiple different mind styles, and the attentional mechanics of doing so during reading, are questions which have been overlooked in previous applications of mind style (see also Nuttall, *Mind Style* 111). In this homodiegetic narrative, such parallel interpretations are explicitly invited as part of the

aesthetic and ethical judgements the text asks of its readers. Firstly, by enabling the same linguistic choices to be attributed to Robbie's first-person experience of war *and* Briony's third-person reconstruction, McEwan allows the question of "what really happened", or judgements as to the narrative's realism and authenticity, to remain unanswered by the text. Secondly, the conflicting impressions of authenticity invited through its linguistic construal and concluding post-script highlight wider societal attitudes towards war narratives, and the ethical "legitimacy" of those who produce them (cf. Campbell; Head). As a civilian participant in the war, Briony's perspective on Robbie's time at the front has a legitimacy of its own. Further, McEwan's fictional adaptation of autobiographical sources can be seen to carry legitimacy as a means of giving voice to multiple individuals. Echoing Aristotle, Owen argues that fiction and biography differ in that fiction "takes the story from the specific to the universal", and in doing so increases the number of people for whom it is relatable. In this text, the positive empathetic effects of this mind style, and its attempt to bear witness to the experiences of those unable to voice them, might be seen to outweigh the ethical uncertainties of its attribution.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article began by raising issues surrounding the fictional representation of experience through mind style, and the real-world individuals and conditions that such texts portray. This article has explored the related concepts of realism and authenticity from a stylistic perspective: i.e. as perceived qualities of narrative that may be manipulated by writers as part of their representation of experience. By identifying the linguistic techniques through which such evaluations are invited (and prevented) in fiction, this research hopes to inform discussion of the implications of doing so, in subsequent mind style research. Such ethical judgements, I would suggest, are dependent on the specific contexts of production and reception for

individual texts. As observed by Warner, "in the case of certain types of textual practice it matters very much who is speaking, both for their political force as testimonies and for the readers' emotional responses upon which their political power is based" (8).

While terms such as "real" and "authentic" are often used by readers and critics of (literary) texts, their linguistic and cognitive grounds merit further study in stylistics (cf. Warner). In Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, I have argued, the impression of a real, first-hand experience of war is created through patterns of linguistic construal which contribute to the impression of a mind style for its focalising character. Analyzed using Cognitive Grammar, the emotional significance of mind style, and related impressions of realism and authenticity, were explained as consequences of the enactment of Robbie's cognitive processes as part of readers' own conceptualization of the situation described. At the same time, it was shown that this text undercuts its own authenticity through linguistic choices contributing to a sense of detachment, or the impression that these experiences are somehow "unreal". This effect serves a triple purpose in this text: at once contributing to an interpretation of trauma as part of Robbie's mind style, subtly preparing the reader for the novel's final reveal, and allowing an alternative attribution of this construal to the mind style of the narrator or author during subsequent readings. The complex ways in which texts such as this claim and deny authenticity, and its emotional and ethical significance for readers, supports the need for further research into this effect in stylistics.

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